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ABSTRACT

The present condition of the United States regarding the education of black college-age youth and the status of historically black colleges is discussed in this paper. Background information on the role of black colleges and an elaboration of present-day problems facing black colleges are presented. The declining enrollment, drop-out rate, counter attacks on and a weakening of affirmative action in student and faculty recruitment, diminishing funds, and distortions surrounding the ability of blacks to pay for higher education are but a few of the problems which seriously affect educational progress. An all-out effort must be made to correct educational inequities if the future is to hold promise for blacks and other minorities. Statistics pertaining to the key issues discussed in this paper are included. (Author/BS)

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TOWARD EQUITY FOR BLACKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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By

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April 1, 1977

I am pleased to have this opportunity to share some personal views with you today on matters relating to the education of Black youth in America. I come today, as a private citizen, representing no group, organization, agency, or institution. I am pleased to be here, by invitation, because there is good reason for all of us to be concerned about the status of conditions in this country regarding the education of Black young people, and the status and health of the historically Black colleges.

Those who lead this country need to seriously address the educational needs of Blacks, other minorities and the poor. We need to raise with our leaders these fundamental questions: Do you believe in a higher education system where race, income and previous education are not the sole determinants of either the quality or quantity of higher education? If so, what steps are you prepared to take to bring this about; what is your program? If not, why, and if not, what qualifies you to lead this country?

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What I shall say is not new. You have heard it before from many persons. You cannot write history. The problems, facts and statistics are there in plain view. What is or ought to be is our approach to the resolution of the problems which plague us.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the late 1960's, with changes in higher education creating more openings for Blacks, a dangerously erroneous view developed based on a lack of knowledge - that is, that the historically Black colleges were not relevant. At that time, as is true now, the

majority of baccalaureates, earned by Blacks, were and are earned at historically Black institutions. Likewise, then and now, three-quarters of the Black Ph.D.'s earned their undergraduate degrees at Black colleges. Most of the doctors and lawyers were either produced out of the Black medical schools and law schools or earned their B.A.'s in undergraduate Black colleges. Statistics will also show that:

- Seventy-five percent of the Black army officers attended Black colleges.

- Eighty percent of the Black judges attended historically Black institutions. So did the only Black Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall

Seven of the Congressional Black Caucus members attended these institutions.

In the south, where voting rights are most effective, 95% of the college-trained elected Black officials were trained at Black institutions. Across public and private lines, the 107 institutions enrolled about half of the undergraduates in four year colleges. This is still true today.

SOME PROBLEMS ON THE HORIZON

This is a critical time, the beginning of the third century of American independence and the beginning of an administration in Washington which, more than any in American history, owes its very being to Blacks. It is time for us to articulate and project our concerns because there are significant problems developing.

For example:

- Irregular freshmen enrollment increases in the last three years. It was down in 73 and 74, up in 75.

- A disproportionate enrollment of Blacks in two-year shcools - almost half of the Black vs less than 40% Whites are in two-year schools and concentrated where non-credit enrollment is high.

- Counter attacks on and weakening of affirmative action in student and faculty recruitment.

Ther there are the distortions in the media that the poor are able to go to and afford any college while the middle class cannot. Let us examine the facts:

1. In 1973 alone, in only 58 Black colleges, 10,000 students did not attend school because of lack of funds.

2. Almost half of the Black college students are in two-year colleges - the lowest cost colleges.

3. The largest numbers of the others are in the lowest cost four-year public colleges and private Black colleges whose costs are low.

4. Without financial aid, Blacks are finished. They will not be able to afford even low cost higher education. Then progress stops and is replaced by regression. The middle class will be pressed, but they will get their offsprings in college and through if it is important.

5. Seventy percent of Black students' families earn less than $7,000 annual income while seventy percent of the White students' families earn more than $10,000 annual income. It is then irresponsible to suggest that low income groups have options for going to college that middle income groups do not.

Blacks also account for a disproportionately high rate of drop-cuts. A census study shows a dropout rate of 59% for Blacks compared to 44% for Whites from the 1st to the 4th year. A number of states are putting enrollment ceilings on all their institutions as economy measures. Black students and Black institutions are not exempted from such ceilings. Inequities still exist in every state between Black and White enrollment. These ceilings tend to lock historic inequities in place.

Legal attacks on the efforts to admit Blacks to graduate and professional schools are increasing in volume, under the labels of reverse discrimination and preferential treatment. These attacks are supported by more and more so-called scholars from prestigious universities. Let it be clear that Black educators view these code words of "reverse discrimination" and "preferential treatment" as invidious and detrimental to the achievement of equity and justice.

Despite the reports of significant enrollment increases, the gap between the number of young college-trained Blacks and Whites

is increasing. In 1960, the gap between the number of 25 to 34 year old Black and White college graduates was 7 percentage points; in 1970 it was 6.3 percentage points; and in 1974, it was 8.1 percentage points. That means we are falling behind in producing the necessary educated Blacks.

Money for graduate and professional scholarships for Blacks is drying up. We hear a great deal of talk about an over supply of professionals among doctors, lawyers, Ph.D's and even too many college undergraduates. This means less money for Blacks and tougher competition for it. It should be made clear that there is no over supply of Black professionals in any field.

Legal attacks on desegregation in higher education in the South, rather than dealing with historic offending institutions; have turned their primary attention to the Black colleges. The mood seems to be, too often, that if we could just solve the problem of the Black colleges everything would be fine. This diverts attention from the fact that Black colleges were uplifting Black education when White institutions were not even interested. The Black colleges are not the problem but they can be an important part of the solution.

We must beware, too, of forms of desegregation which imply that anything run by Blacks is bad and inferior while anything run by Whites is good and superior.

All of these distrubing things I have listed represent the soft underbelly of our educational progress. Taken all together, they define why we feel that, slowly but surely, the progres we have made will be eroded. Even if we move ahead too slowly, we fall further behind and we are still too much in need for that. We spoke earlier of no over supply of Black professionals. Note these statistics:

Only 2.0% of the doctors are Black.
Only 2.5% of the dentists are Black.
Only 1.5% of the lawyers are Black.
Only 2.0% of the Ph.D's are Black

Despite our so-called progress, none of our enrollment figures are much more than half what they ought to be. Even while we have

made some progress, the rules of the game are being changed so that much of our new enrollment is in new and different kinds of schools that may not deliver training that is useful for future increases in the number of college graduates and the number of Black professionals.

There appears to be now developing a national higher education track system much like the old academic vs vocational or business curricula in the high schools. It tracks the poor and the Black disproportionately into something new called "post-secondary education." It tracks the middle and upper income groups into traditional higher education. If its formations is not stopped, it can delay for generations our movement toward equality and equity.

We, therefore, are falling behind in the key area of well-trained potential leaders.

If momentum slows, we will be in a relatively worse position in 1995 than we are today - 1977. There are no signs of abatement in White rates of progress. Despite all the talk about the declining value of college, nobody is buying it, and enrollments continue to grow, even exceeding estimates of experts in the last two years.

Higher education is an early warning system on what the future holds. It tells you about the state of secondary school through the ability of the students to qualify for further training, whether they go on or not. If they cannot and <u>are not</u> qualifying for further training, their prospects in the job market are also dismal.

We know now what the future holds for Blacks above the age of 25. The question is "What does the future hold for those already born and who will populate our schools and colleges up to the year 2000?" All of those Blacks who will complete high school between now and 1993 are already born. All those who will complete high school by 1988 enrolled in the first grade last year - 1976.

Everybody knows the upward mobility valures of a good education. Everyone knows that it is not, by and large, the well educated people who fall prey to crime, welfare, drug addition or poverty. Yet, this nation has so far refused to make an <u>all-out</u> effort to end the educational inequities that can break the entangling webs of poverty, crime, violence and welfare, that make our urban centers

places of fear and places that lack humaneness and civility. We know that despite the code words of politicians, from law and order, to welfare cheats, Blacks, not Whites, pay the heaviest and most devastating toll from crime and violence. Yet, in the past, a sluggish and insensitive nation, in need of leadership, was not told that if it really wants to end poverty, welfare, crime and violence, it must view its domestic needs as just as pressing as its defense and foreign policy needs. We hope and pray that we are witnessing the beginnings of a change in that posture in Washington. The new Administration in Washington seems to be giving signals that it views domestic needs as important. These signs are welcome and deserve our encouragement and support. Our country is as much threatened by those hundred of thousands of first graders who do not make it to the end of high school and become unemployed and worse as by the missles of the Russians. In fact, the fears plaguing the daily lives of millions of Americans are much more damaging. If too many are not capable of functioning in the even more complex world of the 1980's and 1990's, our urban life - north, south, east and west - will not be free from fear.

The call we are making is for educators to declare that, needed resources for education are not to be considered inflationary while the costs for defense are considered priorities and thus noninflationare.

We are saying that there are ways for us to continue to fulfill the dream of a nation at peace both abroad and within itself. Will those first graders starting at the beginning of the third century take up test tubes and computer terminals or will they take up a narcotic-tilled syringe or a Saturday night special between now and 1989? Will those first graders, in 1989, twelve years hence, be finishing their first term in college or their first term in the criminal justice system?

This truly then is not the time to stop searching for new ways of identifying talent among Blacks under the justification that the redress of historic injustices is preferential treatment or reverse discrimination. These new concepts are new devices and excuses for keeping Blacks out and blaming Blacks for the

wayes in which they have been treated in schools and neighborhoods.

This is not the time to claim that our quest for equity in all levels of higher education is an arbitrary quota system. This distorts what Blacks are saying. We are saying simply that as long as we are disportionately outside of any part of American life, we will not stop pushing to get in. Skilled manipulators of ideas in some of our leading universities accuse Blacks of wanting a proportionate share of places in colleges and universities and standards of performance be damned.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Our view is that the systems of selection, of supports for performance must take into account the unequal paths into colleges and universities. If more opportunity for a first rate education is taken from a student before he gets to college, then more opportunities must be given back to him to acquire that education once he is inside a college.

This is not the time to declare an open competition for limited financial aid between middle income and low income groups. Everyone loses in that kind of conflict.

It is easy political salesmanship to promise relief to the middle class at the expense of the poor and the Black. The relief is temporary. The middle class in the long run will continue to pay more welfare costs and criminal justice system costs indefinitely unless this country is prepared to reorder its priorities. It is difficult but necessary leadership to say that if we start now, we can end the cycles of life that lead to these costs.

In a television commerical, a mechanic asks, "Will you pay now, or pay later?" Will you pay for proper preventive care for your car now, or much more for major repairs later. Now-a-days, Americans are being told that the costs of major social repairs can be cut and at the same time cut costs for prevention. Money spent for education and training is a preventive expense; money spent for welfare and jail is an expense for major repairs for major human damages.

The Black colleges have shown what happens to the children of poor parents on the basis of education. Share croppers' sons and daughters become physicians, Ph.D.'s, civil servants and teachers.

The sons and daughters of maids and janitors become engineers, dentists and social workers. That has been the job of higher education historically, it is the job now, it will be the job in the future. The Black colleges know that and are now telling it to the country. If one does not know what these institutions know, he imagines it to be otherwise.

Our interactions here, these three days are to reaffirm that it is shortsighted and destructive to close the doors of equal opportunity, equity and justice.

No one will commit to the short or long haul except those committed to the principle that the fault is the way the society treats Black people and other minorities. We reach out to all who will commit to the long struggle ahead between now and the year 2000. In the 201 year, we start anew toward the end of the first decade of the third century. Twenty-two years before the bicentennial, the Supreme Court ruled on equality of opportunity in education. Twenty-two years beyond 1977 will be 1999, one year before the year 2000. If we do not do better in that 22 years than in the last, the faith of Black Americans in the fulfillment of their deferred dream may be beyond repair. There are ways to prevent this from happening. Let us be a part of that effort.